

Committee on Resources

Full Committee

Testimony

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TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

WASHINGTON, D.C., MAY 11, 1999

Chairman Young, Distinguished Members of the House Resources Committee, Representatives of the U.S. Government, ladies and gentlemen:

I am honored today to relate to you a story, a story of four unique Marshallese communities who, more than forty years after the United States concluded its nuclear testing program in the Marshall Islands, continue to live with a nuclear legacy that shapes their daily existence. It is a story that has become a saga of relocation and displacement, enigmatic illnesses and health care programs, the effort to understand and educate, contamination and cleanup, and wary hopes for resettlement. Most importantly, it is a story of once victimized communities intent on recovery despite the burdens and obstacles that each faces. The Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands supports each of these four communities--Enewetak, Rongelap, Utrik, and Bikini--in their respective efforts to recover the self-sufficient and healthy lifestyle they enjoyed so many years ago on their home atolls.

In my remarks, I will focus the story by speaking to some of the larger issues that tie the four atolls together such as removal and relocation, contamination and cleanup, and resettlement concerns. I will follow this general discussion with a look at the specific situations and concerns of the four atolls as each community charts its own road to recovery and self-sufficiency.

Removal and Relocation

Land is the lifeblood of all Marshallese communities. When an entire community is removed from their land and relocated to new lands, the move effectively tears through the fabric of the community. Individuals from the four atolls possess in differing degrees some of the tools needed to mend this tear. As evidenced in the Compact of Free Association and in subsequent acts of Congress, the United States has acknowledged the burdens placed on the people of Enewetak, Rongelap, Utrik and Bikini as a result of the Nuclear Testing Program and provided these communities with resources to help offset these burdens. However, these resources remain woefully inadequate in light of what was lost and what must now be restored.

I hope the following excerpts from interviews with members of the Rongelap community can convey some sense of what is lost when Marshallese are removed from their land. Listen, for example, to Minister Johnsay Riklon, the national representative from Rongelap, who has witnessed "scattering and splitting in

the community. We need a base. Kids from Rongelap who live in Majuro are not involved in the Rongelap community. There aren't many community activities for them to get involved in. I don't think they feel Rongelapese." One of these Rongelap "kids," a senior in high school, explained his own sense of loss and frustration living on Ebeye where he is dependent on quarterly trust fund payments for food and other basic needs. He says, "Land is life. When you take away land it's like you commit suicide. You take away our livelihood." Today, there are large Rongelapese communities living not only in overcrowded Ebeye, but also in the isolation of Mejjatto Island, the bustling Majuro capitol and far away Hawaii. Maintaining the ties between these scattered populations is an important but difficult task that has been assumed by the Rongelap leadership.

For the four atoll communities whose resource base was either lost or severely compromised as a result of the tests, the trust fund model of compensation as set up under the Compact has proven an essential asset as the communities attempt to regain greater control of their own lives. While proceeds from the trust funds cannot replace the resource base that sustained these communities on their home atolls, these same proceeds can help communities overcome past inequities as they build toward a future. For example, Councilwoman Renny Robert explained to me how the Enewetakese have used their trust funds monies to compensate for the educational disruption caused by their removal to Ujelang. Living on Ujelang from 1947 to 1980, the Enewetakese struggled for the most basic of needs, food and water. Quality education seemed an unattainable luxury. However, with the help of their trust fund monies, the Enewetakese have turned that luxury into reality for everyone on Enewetak. Two highly qualified teachers are paid to work and reside on the atoll, teaching not only school-age children but adults as well. The community is successfully "catching-up" now that they have the resources to back their efforts

In addition to education, health remains a primary concern for people from the four atolls. Prior to the testing, a healthy lifestyle supported by access to local foods and medicinal plants allowed for a sense of self-determination in terms of health. With the loss of these resources, practical compensation measures such as the extension of the U.S.D.A. food program became essential to healthy living. Mr. Chairman, let me take this opportunity to thank Congress for extending this program for another five years. Until the people of the four atolls have their lands safely restored to them, this program will be needed.

While U.S.D.A. has been a success, enigmatic illnesses coupled with the fractionalized system of health care for the four atolls has stripped many ill individuals of the sense of self-determination that is part and parcel of a healthy lifestyle. The Section 177 Health Care Program earmarked for the four atolls has proven wholly inadequate for reasons that will be further explained by Minister deBrum. At the same time, the Rongelapese and Utrikese identified as among the 174 acutely "exposed" victims of the tests may often be "ping-ponged" back and forth between medical programs since the DOE program strictly limits treatment to radiogenic illnesses without consideration for the secondary conditions that are often indirect results of a radiation-related condition. In many cases, patients and their families are left in the dark about the reasons for this "ping-ponging" (a term coined by Marshallese patients). Mr. Joe Saul, Mayor of Utrik, tells the story of his uncle who was sent by DOE for treatment of a radiogenic illness in Hawaii. After two weeks of tests, the DOE doctors told him that they had done all they could and referred him to the 177 Health Care Program. When Mayor Saul joined his uncle in Honolulu, it was only to hear from a new round of doctors that treatment would not be forthcoming. The uncle returned to Majuro untreated and unaware of the nature of his illness. He died three months later.

Self-sufficiency means having the resources and ability to make informed and meaningful decisions about life's basics--home, health, and education. The programs and assistance extended to the four atolls under the Compact and the assistance from Congress since has in some measure enabled the four atoll communities to

make their own decisions, chart their own course. However, what was lost--i.e., self-sufficiency--has yet to be restored. Until that happens, I urge the US Government to join the RMI in its support of the four atoll communities for as Minister Riklon reminds us, "the goal for the future should be to restore self-sufficiency."

Contamination and Cleanup

Mr. Chairman, I submit that the cleanup of lands that remain contaminated is a key to restoration of self-sufficiency. At the outset, I would like recognize Congressional assistance that has reached beyond the purview of the Compact to support the radiological rehabilitation efforts of Enewetak, Bikini, and Rongelap. As I have said previously, monies generated by trust funds for cleanup are an essential element to the recovery process for these atolls. However, several outstanding issues must be addressed before this recovery process can move forward.

First and foremost, the RMI Government is concerned for the welfare of Marshallese citizens involved in cleanup efforts. Past experience with rehabilitation and resettlement projects on Enewetak, Bikini and Rongelap have all proved the same point: a safety inspection mechanism must be in place to ensure against radiation exposure. In Enewetak, in Bikini, and now in Rongelap we have been forced to rely on the word of DOE and U.S. contractors that specifications for safety have been followed to the letter. The RMI Government cannot afford to rely on the word of those who have time and time again been proven wrong. Therefore, we need independent experts who can conduct reliable inspections of the cleanup sites. Only in this way can we assure our citizens of their safety.

Part and parcel of this concern for safety is the need for both the RMI and the U.S. Governments to arrive at an agreed upon cleanup standard for radioactively contaminated lands. The U.S. Environment Protection Agency has set a 15 millirem cleanup standard for the 23 nuclear weapons development and production facilities located in the United States. Based on EPA's expertise, the Nuclear Claims Tribunal has adopted this same standard in its deliberations of land claims cases. The RMI Government asks only that its lands be cleaned up to the same standard as U.S. lands. Certainly, Marshallese citizens deserve the same measure of protection from harm as United States citizens.

The costs entailed in the provision of these protective measures certainly add to the cost of cleanup. However, what cannot be forgotten is that, protection or no, the cost for cleanup greatly exceeds the monies provided for the accomplishment of the same. While the US specifically accepted responsibility in the Section 177 Agreement for "compensation owing . . . for loss or damage to property...resulting from the nuclear testing program," Section 177 funds have proven manifestly inadequate to cover property loss or damage. Enewetak alone estimates that the cost to rehabilitate the radioactively contaminated northern islands in the atoll will cost in the neighborhood of \$160 million dollars. When this figure is quoted for just one atoll, the inadequacy of the \$150 million provided for in Section 177 becomes clear. As you will hear in later testimony, the

Nuclear Claims Tribunal lacks the funds to pay awards for land claim cases presented by the four atolls. Thus, until it acquires the necessary funding for these awards, the Tribunal cannot fulfill its mandate is to render "final determination upon all claims . . . in any way related to the Nuclear Testing Program."

As alluded to previously, Congress has appropriated monies since the Compact went into effect for cleanup in Enewetak, Bikini and Rongelap. Again, these trust fund monies have proven to be an essential element in the restoration process. However, I ask you to note that in each and every case, the money appropriated by

Congress did not take into account the costs of complete cleanup and restoration. Bikini provides a perfect example. The \$90 million dollar community trust fund accounts only for the cleanup of Bikini and Eneu, just two of Bikini Atoll's 23 islands. And yet, without access to the resources on every single island in the atoll, the Bikinians could not live a healthy or self-sufficient lifestyle in their home.

I would like to make one final point regarding cleanup costs. Oftentimes, when figures are quoted in terms of appropriations already made and costs still outstanding, the price tag for recovery and restoration appears staggering. However, when you compare these costs with the price the United States is paying to clean up its own nuclear weapons testing sites, the RMI figures are extremely moderate. For the last three years, Congress has appropriated an average of \$5.75 billion dollars a year for the Department of Energy's Environmental Management program which is charged with the cleanup of 23 nuclear weapons development and production facilities in the US. In that time, over \$10 billion has been spent on one site alone - Hanford - without removing the smallest particle of contaminated soil. It is estimated that the total cost of the program will be \$147 billion. Compared to these billions, the millions sorely needed for cleanup in the RMI are both modest and reasonable.

Resettlement

As communities engage in cleanup activities and prepare to resettle, I would like to remind the Committee that resettlement cannot translate automatically into self-sufficient, healthy communities. Resettlement brings with it a new set of needs as returning communities--unaccustomed to life in their own homes because of their long absence--attempt to yet again to build a new life. The land will have to be re-learned, homes re-built, skills re-taught, schools re-formed, and community ties re-enforced.

Currently engaged in resettlement activities, Rongelap is faced with these issues. Phase I of their Resettlement Program addresses several of the needs I have mentioned. They are building basic infrastructure: airport runway, dock, hospital dispensary, power plant, etc. They have a dependable water supply. The village lines have been drawn. But, a host of questions remain. Who determines whether or not Rongelap, after the rehabilitation project, is actually safe? If it is determined to be safe by a RMI led inspection team, will the Rongelapese choose to resettle? What will life be like in Rongelap especially given the incomplete nature of the cleanup project? The \$40 million they have received for restoration and resettlement only covers the cost to clean up one part of one island. How will the generation of children who have literally grown up and away from the atoll be reassimilated into an outer island lifestyle? The community will have to answer these questions once the project enters its second phase. The stronger their resource base, the more assurance they have regarding environmental safety, the more options for growth they are given, the better able they will be to answer these questions. If, however, needed resources are pulled from resettlement projects, the constraint on community choices makes the restoration process that much more difficult. Thus, the RMI Government supports Rongelap's request that the \$5.3 million deducted from the original Congressional appropriation of \$40 million be added to the Rongelap Resettlement Trust Fund. Like Bikini and Enewetak, Rongelap has a proven track record of wise management of this resource base. With it, these atolls can make resettlement a central element in their overall program of recovery.

Mr. Chairman, now that I have addressed some of the overall issues that impact the four atolls, permit me to focus my discussion more closely on the individual communities themselves. Although certain themes thread through any discussion of the four atolls, it would be a mistake to lose sight of the very real differences that define the experiences of Bikinians, Enewetakese, Rongelapese and Utrikese since the tests.

Where were they then, where are they now, and where do they hope to be--these are the type of questions that will frame my story of each atoll community. I hope in this way to convey some of the details that are missing from my general overview.

For additional detail, I direct your attention to the statements submitted for the record by the Bikini, Enewetak, Rongelap and Utrik delegations. In my discussion, I will summarize in brief each of these statements in addition to providing information of the situation of the four atoll communities today.

Enewetak

After 33 years of exile on Ujelang, the Enewetakese began returning home to the southern islands of Enewetak in 1980. The cleanup process involved scraping topsoil in the areas to be resettled. The contaminated soil was dumped into a bomb crater left from the testing period and then covered with cement. The result was Runit Dome, a structure that sits beside the re-inhabited islands of the Enewetakese. Whether or not the radioactive materials contained in this dome are leeching into the surrounding environment and affecting the health of the people is unknown. The Enewetakese do not have access to the resources or expertise to monitor the structure. If indeed this nuclear waste storage structure presents a radiation exposure hazard to the people, the RMI Government and not the US Government who built this structure will have to bear the ensuing burdens.

I would like to stress the extreme hardship suffered by the Enewetak people not only during their stay on Ujelang but since they have been resettled in Enewetak. Indeed, I believe the Enewetak case illustrates the very difficulties that I have previously mentioned in relation to resettlement. While the people of Enewetak certainly have returned home, they have by no means had their home restored to the condition in which they left it. Scraping topsoil from the southern islands literally stripped the land bare of its productive capacity. Simply growing food for survival becomes a nearly impossible feat. Products on the northern islands offer the islanders no recourse since these islands remain contaminated. Essentially, the Enewetakese have lost their ability to live a self-sufficient, Marshallese lifestyle. The psychological stress entailed in this loss makes life on the "New Enewetak" a daily struggle.

In spite of these continuing burdens, the Enewetak community have effected notable successes since resettlement. As I indicated earlier, trust fund monies have enabled the community to make a strong commitment to education. Whereas few Enewetak students passed the national high school entrance exam in the past, nearly all Enewetakese eighth graders can now move on to high school. The food and agriculture provisions of Section 177 have also proved particularly helpful because of the inability to grow adequate food crops for local consumption. There is also the added constraint that food from the northern islands remains off limits. Until such time as these islands have been cleaned of lingering radiation, the support of these programs will be needed.

The people of Enewetak want the northern islands cleaned. In an extremely constrained atoll ecosystem, access to all available resources is critical to survival. Self-sufficient living is impossible without this access. Therefore, Enewetak has brought their land claims case before the Nuclear Claims Tribunal. Case estimates put the price tag for cleaning, restoring and resettling the northern islands at \$160 million. This figure does not include the estimates put forward for loss of use of the land and consequential damages suffered as a result of the testing program. Yes, the costs do add up. However, this is the price that needs to be paid now to restore a sense of self-sufficiency.

Rongelap

86 members of the Rongelap community living on the atolls of Aliniginiae and Rongelap at the time of the Bravo shot were identified as having been acutely exposed to radiation. These Rongelapese were removed from their home in 1954. Three years later, they were resettled on Rongelap along with other members of the community despite the continued risk of radiation in the environment. In the years that followed the community experienced alarming changes in their health and environment that the U.S. doctors and scientists who visited the island could not adequately explain to them. For the first time, eating staple foods such as arrowroot caused their mouths to blister. Babies described as looking like "jelly fish" and "grapes" were born. More and more people in the community, including those who were not in the "acutely exposed" group but had moved back for the first time in 1957, suffered from mysterious illnesses, oftentimes cancers. When the gap between incidents and information finally began to close and the community began to comprehend the risk from their environment, they decided to evacuate. Thus, in 1985 they moved to Mejatto, an isolated island in Kwajalein Atoll. In 1995, a full ten years later, the U.S. finally determined what the Rongelapese had suspected all along: Rongelap could not be safely resettled without radiological rehabilitation.

If Rongelap was contaminated in 1995, imagine how dangerously contaminated it must have been in 1957. And yet, Mr. Chairman, the U.S. Department of Energy refuses to acknowledge to that Rongelapese who moved back in 1957 suffered internal exposure to radiation. Thus, Rongelapese in the 1957 group who experience exactly the same set of medical conditions as those who were exposed to actual fallout are not eligible for DOE medical care. The burden of care for these Rongelapese has thus been shifted to the underfunded 177 health care program and the already overtaxed RMI public health care system. Until the Rongelapese have access to the health care assistance that they deserve, they cannot begin to care for themselves in even the most basic sense.

As I stated previously, the Rongelap Atoll Local Government has been pushing forward with a rehabilitation and resettlement program that reflects the various implementing agreements signed to that end since 1992. I would like to reiterate Rongelap's request for the \$5.3 million deducted from the total sum authorized by Congress at this time. The importance of this request becomes apparent when you consider the following points. First, the estimated cost of the resettlement program for Rongelap Island is double the amount appropriated by Congress which means that the balance must be made up through the prudent management of the trust fund corpus. Second, Rongelap is drawing down assets faster than expected in the effort to work closely with the RMI government to support the medical and environmental monitoring measures that must be in place to ensure the safety of workers currently residing in Rongelap as well as those who may eventually return.

Rebuilding Rongelapese trust in their environment and the people who monitor it and them after the years of misinformation and mystery will take time and education. Too often, the Rongelapese have either been forced to make their decisions in the dark or deprived of their right to decide altogether. An extreme example of this would be the experiment wherein Rongelapese were injected with radioactive elements without their knowledge much less informed consent. In light of this history, the ability to make meaningful and informed decisions about their future becomes central to the community's recovery from victimization. The decision to resettle will be left to a later date when more is known about the environmental safety of a rehabilitated Rongelap. Until the Rongelapese can be assured that it is safe to return, they will continue to

make a life for themselves elsewhere. Whether they live in the isolation of Mejatto, crowded Ebeye conditions, or the capitol of Majuro, their years away from home have profoundly changed their community.

Utrik

The Utrikese were also resettled in an environment with lingering radiation. Please note that the people of Utrik were returned to their island just three months after the Bravo test of 1954. They remained there for the rest of the testing period and have continued living on the atoll in the years since. Thus, Utrikese concern focuses on the chronic exposure to radiation that members of their community have suffered as a result of living in a radioactively contaminated environment day in and day out for years.

Indeed, recently declassified DOE documents disclose that in 1956 an Advisory Committee to the US Atomic Energy Commission described Utrik as by "by far the most contaminated place in the world." This was a full two years after the Utrikese has been resettled in their home atoll. As in the case of Rongelapese, the ensuing chronic exposure to radiation is of extreme concern. The community attributes their persistent health problems to the effects of this chronic internal exposure compounded with the external exposure received during the testing period. Just as one example, take the reproductive abnormalities that have skyrocketed in number since the 1950s. The numbers translate into even more frightening experiences. Groping for words to explain these new experiences, a Utrikese women states, "some women gave birth to creatures like cats, rats, and the insides of turtles--like intestines...most of the women had miscarriages, including myself who gave birth to things resembling grapes and other fruits."

While these problems affect members of the community who were not present on the day of the Bravo test, once again the DOE health care program limits its enrollment to the 168 who were present on March 1, 1954. Medical monitoring must be stepped up to allow for the internal exposure to radiation that people living on Utrik have experienced over time. The Utrik community requires a health program that is responsive to their needs over and above the needs of research scientists.

The discovery and disclosure of information regarding the effects of the testing program is critically important to the people of Utrik. I will briefly summarize what the community is looking for. First, the amount and types of radiation doses that Utrik was exposed to as a result of all 67 tests in the Marshalls, not just Bravo and other Castle series tests. Second, an independent risk assessment survey to determine just how affected the people have been by the testing program. Finally, a medical monitoring and treatment program that is responsive to the questions and needs of its patients. Once again, informed decision making is part and parcel of the path to recovery from victimization.

Before I turn to the Bikinian situation, Mr. Chairman, I would like to relate to you a story that was shared with me by Mr. Joe Saul. Mayor Saul is among the select population identified as "exposed" to radiation on Utrik. He was present on March 1, 1954. When the community was returned to Utrik after three months of camp life on Kwajalein, they did not immediately disembark from the US Navy ship. They waited for days, anchored offshore, while the U.S. forces that transported them scoured the island for animals. These animals--primarily pigs and chickens--were a source of food for the islanders. When they finally disembarked, all these animals had been destroyed. Provided no explanation for this action and in need of food, the Utrikese hunted down animals on other islands in the atoll that had escaped the U.S. search. Mayor Saul said they ate the food without an inkling of the radiation they were ingesting into their bodies. They were never warned of any danger.

Today, the Utrikese are trying to make informed decisions about their physical, social and economic needs. Their decisions represent a significant step toward recovery from the legacy of the tests.

Bikini

The Bikinians left Bikini more than 53 years ago. While Kili is their home in exile, large communities of Bikinians also reside in Majuro and as far away as Enid, Oklahoma. Life for these different communities present many different sets of concerns. For those living on Kili, life is severely restricted. Whereas Bikini boasted a large lagoon encompassed by a total of 23 islands, Kili is a single island with neither lagoon nor additional land resources. The generations of Bikinians who have spent their lives away from Bikini have lost prized fishing and ocean-faring skills. Bikinians on the island of Ejit in Majuro and those living in the States face a host of displacement problems as well. Separated from the heart of the Bikinian community, these far flung members must make lives for themselves away from the support system of a closely knit Marshallese community.

In addition to the points I have raised earlier with regard to the Bikinians, there are a number of immediately pressing issues that face the people today. Like the Rongelapese, members of the community were prematurely resettled in 1972. The resettled families based their decision to return in part on a 1968 guarantee issued by President Lyndon Johnson that Bikini was safe. Before they return again, the Bikinians would like a similar guarantee. The track record with U.S. Government scientists has left no room for trust of their safety assessments. Lacking their own expertise and in the absence of independent scientists, they request a second guarantee.

Resettlement plans for the future are hindered by the lack of funding for a complete cleanup of the atoll. The \$90 million Resettlement Trust Fund will only pay for cleanup activities on the two islands. If and when resettlement becomes a reality, the Bikinians are committed to acceptable environmental safety standards for both workers and returning residents. With the proper safety measures in place, the RMI Government will wholeheartedly support any future resettlement activities in Bikini.

We would also like to take this opportunity to support the Bikinian's request for a 3% distribution from their Resettlement Trust Fund. In particular, the distribution will benefit Bikini elders who will most likely die on Kili because current resettlement funds cannot cover cleanup costs. Theirs is the saddest story. A 3% distribution cannot make them happier away from home but it may provide some comfort toward the end of their lives.

The wise management and use of trust monies is one of several successes in the Bikinian community. Perhaps you have heard, Mr. Chairman, of the world-class diving operation that has made Bikini a sought after dive spot in recent years. The operation was put together and is run with community support. In fact, as part of the program, Bikinians have been employed as trained divers and boat operators in the business. It is these initiatives that evidence the decision-making for the future in this as yet burdened community. It is these initiatives that will one day translate into some measure of self sufficiency for a community who lost their natural resource base. It is these initiatives that show that the losses of the four atolls can be combated and compensated for when adequate support is provided to these communities.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to provide a brief summary of my comments:

- Self-sufficiency is our goal for the nation and for the four atolls.
- Contaminated environments and displacement from these environment burden the four atoll

communities enormously as they struggle for self-sufficiency.

- The 177 Agreement provides a trust fund mechanism--successfully adopted and employed by the four atolls--that has allowed for progress toward self-sufficiency. Further progress and continued success depends on additional support since the \$150 million has proved manifestly inadequate.
- Access to adequate resources and health care are essential compensation measures for communities that have either lost their land or lived in a contaminated environment. Therefore, support for the four atoll food and agriculture programs as well as an expansion of existing health care provisions is critical to recovery.
- Contaminated lands in the RMI need to be cleaned up to the same standard that is applied in the United States: 15 millirems.
- Reliable radiological monitoring and a safety inspection mechanism is a prerequisite for resettlement.

Mr, Chairman, this summary cannot capture the complexities of the story that I set out to tell today. However, I hope it will highlight for you the concerns of the RMI Government and the four atoll communities as we work together to restore the self-sufficiency that was lost as a result of United States Nuclear Testing Program. While we still have a long way to go in attaining our goal, with your support and the support of your colleagues in Congress we can build on the successful progress we have already made. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the RMI Government and the communities of Enewetak, Rongelap, Utrik and Bikini, I ask for your support.

Kommol tata and thank you for your kind attention.

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